

# BRIGHT GRANT CALL

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ACCEPTING  
APPLICATION

2024/2025

## TIMELINE

Call for proposals opens	22 March 2024
Deadline for submission of proposals	10 May 2024
Grant notification	3 June 2024

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Bringing Research to Impact for Global Health at Tsinghua (BRIGHT) Grant is a competitive awards program funded by Research Fund, Vanke School of Public Health (VSPH), Tsinghua University. This program invites BRIGHT Network members to apply for funds to support research and capacity-building activities on topics of importance to solving critical global health challenges. The funded projects are conducted in partnership with Tsinghua mentors. The BRIGHT Grant helps to nurture the professional development of early career researchers from developing countries, and ultimately provides the grant recipients with the knowledge, skills, and connections to further their careers as leaders in global health research.

The BRIGHT Grant funding opportunity looks to support locally-generated research projects that 1) aid in our understanding of how public health issues affect people's lives in developing countries, and 2) test approaches to help individuals, families, communities, and other stakeholders respond to and mitigate the effects of those challenges.

In the 2024/2025 application cycle, we will fund research proposals addressing the **priority areas** listed below:

### 1. Prevention, Treatment, and Management of Chronic Diseases.

Currently, the majority of low- and middle-income countries are undergoing significant epidemiological transitions, with some having already completed this transition. One of the most notable features is the gradual increase in the burden of chronic diseases, including hypertension, diabetes, and hyperlipidemia, posing a severe threat to the health of residents of these countries. However, due to the widespread issues of inadequate healthcare systems and shortages of medical resources in low- and middle-income countries, the demands for the prevention and management of chronic diseases often go unmet. Therefore, it is crucial for the residents of these countries to

effectively prevent, treat, and manage chronic diseases and achieve sustainable healthcare. This project aims to select the most competitive research, fully utilize existing resources, innovate research models, and explore the prevention, treatment, and management of chronic diseases in low- and middle-income countries.

## **2. Malnutrition Transition in Low- and Middle-income Countries: Trend, Causes and Interventions.**

Chronic noncommunicable diseases are increasingly frequent in low- and middle-income countries, but problems of malnutrition, such as growth restriction in children or micronutrient deficiencies persist in these same countries. Due to the disasters caused by climate change, experts are warning of increases in undernutrition in both the immediate and long terms.

In this context, the research topic in this priority area hopes to contribute to:

- 1) exploring the trend of malnutrition changes in low- and middle-income countries; or
- 2) exploring the causes of malnutrition in certain population, especially in infants, lactating women and adolescents; or
- 3) assessing the impact of social protection programs and community-based interventions nutrition education programs, such as cash transfers and food assistance and tailored initiatives on reducing malnutrition; or
- 4) exploring the role of technology and innovation in improving nutrition outcomes.

## **3. Innovations for Saving Lives at Birth.**

Currently, poor maternal and child health remains a significant challenge in many developing countries. Progress towards maternal and newborn mortality targets has stagnated in these countries, where health disparities and inequities persist. Conventional approaches may help close the gap. However, addressing last-mile problems requires cross-disciplinary collaboration and innovations on technology and approaches, which ultimately leads to achieving equitable access to primary health care. This project aims to support innovations on interventions, technologies, or strategies to improve maternal health. By focusing on community, proposed research and development, or pilot should aim to improve monitoring, diagnosis, and treatment for maternal health, and build evidence what works to support scale-up of proven interventions.

## **4. Enhancing Access to Medications through Health Systems in Low- and Middle-income Countries.**

The availability of medications in low- and middle-income countries encounters significant barriers. These challenges encompass a range of issues, from deficiencies in drug management systems to the constrained capabilities of local pharmaceutical industries, impeding access to medications that are safe, efficacious, affordable, and of high quality. Assessment and analysis of the current situation and influencing factors associated to access to medicines are urgently needed as these countries have geared towards strengthening their health systems for universal health coverage. This initiative aims to analyze the current landscape of medicine access and develop collaborative strategies with China, including technical exchanges, industrial cooperation, and market expansion, to improve access. It is also important to provide policy and implementing recommendations based on study

results and cooperation practices. This will include but not limited to strengthening intergovernmental communication and coordination, optimizing drug registration policy and procedures, providing technology transfer and capacity building, to facilitate long-term cooperation and development between China and other developing countries to improve equitable access to medicines.

#### **5. Developing Effective Psychosocial Support for People Living with or at Risk of HIV.**

AIDS, which was once a death sentence, is now a chronic, manageable disease. But mental health issues such as depression and anxiety still loom large for people living with or at risk of HIV when stigma, misinformation, and trauma remain unaddressed. Mental health impairments increase risk for HIV acquisition and for negative health outcomes among people living with HIV at each step in the HIV care continuum. Unfortunately, people living with or at risk of HIV lack adequate access to psychological support in developing countries. This project aims to strengthen HIV prevention and care outcomes through exploring psychosocial interventions for people living with or at risk of HIV at community or population level, and prioritize psychosocial support with appropriate resources to address the current mental health screening and treatment gaps in HIV care.

### **APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY**

Eligible applicants must

- Be registered BRIGHT Network members;
- Be living and working in the country in which they are proposing to conduct research projects;
- Have experience and/or substantial potential in conducting public health research in developing countries;
- Be willing to work with and be mentored by Tsinghua VSPH faculty members;
- Have the support of their host academic or work institutions that would allow them the time to participate in the proposed research program and to travel as required to key BRIGHT Network meetings; and
- Communicate effectively in English (via speech, reading, and writing).

The BRIGHT Grant funds are issued only to institutions or organizations, not to individuals. Individuals who have no institutional affiliation or whose institutions are unwilling or unable to accept and manage a grant for them are not eligible to apply. Since the BRIGHT network is a scientific research network, we are especially interested in supporting applicants based at higher education or research institutions in developing countries.

Individual applicants may not submit more than one proposal in any one application cycle of the BRIGHT Grant.

### **GRANTS**

Applicants may request up to USD \$28,000 for their projects, which are not to exceed 12 months in duration. Although critical equipment purchases are allowed, applicants should justify all expenses

in the context of their proposed research. The emphasis of the BRIGHT grants is on the generation of solutions to pressing public health issues and not on improvement of research infrastructure.

### **Types of Research Activities Supported**

Projects may cover diverse types of research activities, including but not limited to the following:

- Design and conduct of baseline surveys, modelling and simulation, implementation/operational research.
- Primary data collection and analysis.
- Proof of concept studies and formative investigations.
- Systems research and policy studies.
- Primary research or data collection for understanding underlying social, political, and economic context of public health challenges.
- Working visits to share and analyze data and write papers with collaborators.
- Dissemination events and stakeholder meetings to translate research results to policy-makers and the community.
- Identification of social barriers to the uptake of proven public health interventions.

In addition to research, the BRIGHT Grant funds may also be used to support capacity building activities that contribute to research objectives, including education and training support for BRIGHT Network members; international travel; conference and workshop attendance; communications; and equipment, materials, and supplies for implementing the study and developing research networks.

There are some categories of research that the BRIGHT Grant will **NOT** support:

- Implementation projects that lack a strong research component.
- Secondary data analysis of publicly available or other readily available datasets.
- Dissertation work of the proposed Principal Investigator (PI).
- Training programs, workshops, or conferences that are not tied to the proposed research project.
- Randomized control trials (RCTs) for biomedical interventions such as vaccines, drugs, etc.
- Projects that are not likely to yield any impact in developing countries.
- Basic research not directly linked to potential development impact.
- Approaches that present unacceptable ethical or safety risks as determined by the technical reviewers.

### **Offerings of the BRIGHT Funded Projects**

1. Participation in a series of activities designed for further career development together with assigned Tsinghua mentors, including monthly conference calls to discuss ongoing research projects, new funding sources for career development, and opportunities for wider collaboration as well as additional training activities.
2. Travel to one BRIGHT Network annual meeting and to one national or international scientific meetings, during the project period. International travel is approvable only if affordable and if a BRIGHT Network member is presenting work. Attendance at the BRIGHT Network annual meetings is required and must be included in the budget.

3. Proposed 10% to 30% salary support for PI, Co-investigators, and temporary project staff who might need to be hired to collect data or support field work, depending upon the nature of the proposal and resources available.

## REVIEW PROCESS AND CRITERIA

The proposal application and review process will be managed by the BRIGHT Network Operating Office. Applications will be evaluated by a team assembled by the BRIGHT Network Scientific Committee according to the review criteria below.

1. **Scientific merit and study design:** The reviewers will evaluate (1) whether the background information clearly identifies a gap in evidence that informs the rationale and the study objectives; (2) whether the overall study design, outcome measures, study population, intervention, and analyses are clear, well-reasoned, and appropriate to accomplish the objectives of the project. Adequate citations and references to pertinent literature are essential.
2. **Protection of human subject:** Are there clear plans for safeguarding the welfare of participants, and minimizing potential risks?
3. **Investigators:** Are the PI, Co-investigators and other key personnel qualified to achieve the research goals of the project by having the relevant education, experience, training, and/or accomplishments?
4. **Innovation:** Does the project propose novel application, utilization, and/or generation of scientific methodologies or practices; challenge existing paradigms or programmatic practice; or address an innovative hypothesis? Does the research include the development of a new solution or intervention, or does it apply technology in a new way?
5. **Dissemination plan:** Does the plan discuss how the research findings will be disseminated to key stakeholders and utilized to improve scientific capacity, public health policies and programs?
6. **Timeline:** Is the project timeline reasonable? Is there a clear strategy for achieving program goal within the project period?
7. **Budget:** Is the project budget requested reasonable and adequate to support the proposed scope of work? Are all budget justifications appropriate?

## HOW TO APPLY

All proposals must be submitted online, in English, via the BRIGHT program website <https://bright.vsph.tsinghua.edu.cn>. Paper and e-mail submissions are not accepted. After the proposals are reviewed, applicants will receive notification from the BRIGHT Network operating office indicating the review results.

Applications must be completed in full, including the following sections:

1. **General Principal Investigator (PI) Information**

Please answer the set of questions in the indicated spaces.

2. **Curriculum Vitae (CV) for PI**

Please upload the latest CV of the proposed PI. CV should be no more than two pages in length (single spaced, 11 font Arial type) and include citations for no more than ten recent relevant publications. A CV template is available for your reference. Please do not submit electronic copies of publications or other background materials, as they will not be forwarded to reviewers.

3. **Key Personnel Information**

Please list up to two key personnel that will participate as Co-investigators in the research project proposed. Key personnel are defined as individuals who will contribute in a substantive, meaningful way to the scientific development or execution of the project, whether or not salaries are requested.

4. **Application Focus**

Please select the primary topic area that best describes the content of your application.

5. **Project Title**

6. **Project Summary** (Word limit: 500)

Please briefly and clearly state the goals of the project and the associated proposed activities, and describe the anticipated outcomes of the project.

7. **Application Package**

The following is required to be contained in the package:

- A. **Project proposal.** Please provide a maximum five-page project proposal (single spaced, 11 font Arial type) describing the research you wish to accomplish in the 12-month funding period. A proposal template is available for your reference.
- B. **Budget form.** Each project may receive up to USD \$28,000 which is intended to support project lasting for 12 months. Please provide an itemized budget for the project using the budget template provided to you, encompassing:
- Salary support for PI, Co-investigators, and temporary project staff of 10%-30%;
  - Travel to one BRIGHT Network annual meeting (3-day meeting; tentative location: Beijing/China)
  - Travel to one other professional meeting;
  - Research-related expenses that may include publication, books, software, communication, photocopying, and/or a computer or related hardware;
  - Indirect costs. If requested, indirect costs (costs supporting overall institutional operations and management) should be kept to a minimum.
- C. **Budget request justification.** These justifications should be detailed and thorough.

- Salaries. If applicants requesting salary coverage in their project, budget justification must include a list of personnel to be supported, an explanation of their roles, and the percentage of their time that would be devoted to the project.
- Travel costs. Please provide the number of travelers, duration, location, and purpose for any project-related trips for which funds are requested.
- Equipment. Where possible, projects should leverage existing equipment. Requests for equipment should be justified in terms of importance to successfully completing the research project. Please provide an explanation, justification, and estimated cost for proposed purchases of any items (instruments and devices costing more than USD \$1,500 each) in this category.
- Other Direct Costs. This section should include items such as materials and supplies (including small instruments and devices costing less than USD \$1,500 each), computer services, publication costs, workshops and conferences, or other specific costs that are not covered elsewhere in the budget justification section.
- Indirect Costs. If requested, indirect costs (costs supporting overall institutional operations and management) should be kept to a minimum and must be fully explained and justified, with details provided on what specific institutional infrastructure elements or support services are covered.

D. A copy of your institution/organization's **registration license**.

E. **Letter of support** from an official at the PI's institution who is legally authorized to make commitments on the institution's behalf. The letter must be signed and written on official institutional letterhead and must include the following elements:

- Confirmation that the institution supports the participation of its staff in the proposed project, would be willing to receive and administer any funds awarded, and would be permitted under local regulations to receive funds from a foreign sponsor.
- A brief description of the institution's structures and practices for project management and financial oversight, as well as a description of the process by which the institution could receive funds from a foreign sponsor.
- A brief description of resources that the institution would be making available (if any) to facilitate the project, whether in cash or in kind, for example, providing laboratory or office space, access to equipment, or office support staff.

## QUESTIONS?

We encourage your inquiries concerning this funding opportunity and welcome the opportunity to answer questions from potential applicants. Please contact Zhong Li, Program Coordinator, [zhongli1104@mail.tsinghua.edu.cn](mailto:zhongli1104@mail.tsinghua.edu.cn).